WE CLAIM:

1. A method for identifying to a user the cause of an event occurring within a computer system, the method comprising:

maintaining at the computer system a rule comprising one or more conditions and one or more actions that are performed when the one or more conditions are satisfied;

periodically performing an evaluation to determine whether the conditions are satisfied;

performing the one or more actions in response to determining that the conditions are satisfied;

receiving a request to identify the cause of the performance of the one or more actions; and

in response to receiving the request, identifying the rule to the user.

2. The method of Claim 1, wherein the one or more conditions comprise receiving an electronic mail message and wherein the one or more actions comprise displaying a first user interface dialog box indicating that the electronic mail message has been received.

3. The method of Claim 2, wherein the first user interface dialog box comprises a user interface object that, when selected, displays a second user interface dialog box that identifies the rule.

4. The method of Claim 3, wherein receiving a request to identify the cause of the performance of the one or more actions comprises receiving a selection of the user interface object.

5. The method of Claim 4, wherein identifying the rule to the user comprises displaying a user interface object that identifies the rule.

6. A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-readable instructions which, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to perform the method of Claim 1.

7. A computer-controlled apparatus capable of performing the method of Claim 1.

8. A method for identifying to a user the cause of an event occurring within a computer system, the method comprising:

providing within the computer system a facility for defining rules related to the handling of electronic mail messages, each rule comprising one or more conditions and one or more actions to be performed if the one or more conditions are satisfied;

allowing a user to define, through the facility, a rule that causes a first indication to be displayed in response to receiving an electronic mail message that satisfies one or more conditions; and

providing within the first indication an object that may be selected by a user to retrieve the identity of the rule that caused the first indication to be displayed.

9. The method of Claim 8, further comprising receiving a selection of the object and, in response thereto, displaying a second indication that identifies the rule.

10. The method of Claim 9, wherein the first indication further comprises an identity of the electronic mail message.

11. The method of Claim 9, wherein the first indication comprises the identity of a plurality of electronic mail messages, wherein a one of the plurality of electronic mail messages may be selected as a selected message, and wherein the object may be selected to retrieve the identity of the rule that caused the indication to be displayed for the selected message.

12.   The method of Claim 11, wherein the first indication further comprises a user interface object that, when selected, will open the selected message for viewing.

13.   The method of Claim 12, wherein the first indication further comprises a user interface object which, when selected, will dismiss the first indication.

14.   The method of Claim 13, wherein the second indication further comprises one or more user interface objects which, when selected, provide functionality for editing the rule.

15.   A computer-readable medium having stored thereon computer-readable instructions which, when executed by a computer, cause the computer to perform the method of Claim 8.

16.   A computer-controlled apparatus capable of performing the method of Claim 8.

17.   A method for identifying to a computer user the cause of an event occurring within a computer system, the method comprising:

storing within the computer system one or more user-defined message handling rules, at least one of the rules operative to generate a first indication message in response to receiving at the computer system an electronic mail message satisfying one or more conditions;

receiving an electronic mail message;

in response to receiving the electronic mail message, performing an evaluation to determine if the one or more conditions are satisfied by the received message;

generating the first indication message in response to determining that the one or more conditions are satisfied by the received message;

receiving a request to identify the rule that caused the indication message to be displayed; and

in response to the request, generating a second indication message identifying the rule that caused the first indication message to be displayed.

18.   The method of Claim 17, wherein the first indication message comprises information related to the received message.

19.   The method of Claim 18, wherein the request to identify the rule that caused the indication message to be displayed comprises the selection of a user interface object contained within the first indication.

20.   The method of Claim 19, wherein the second indication message further comprises a facility for editing the rule that caused the first indication message to be displayed.